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October 18, 2003

The Honorable Colin Powell
Secretary of State
United States Department of State
Washington, D.C.

Dear Secretary Powell:

As recent adoptive parents, we are writing to express our grave reservations regarding the Hague Convention on International Adoptions. Simply stated, we urge the U.S. Department of State to reconsider support for the Hague agreement as it is currently constituted. Our opposition centers on the fact that this agreement will mean the death knell for hundreds of small, independent adoption agencies such as Thursday's Child Inc. We worked with Thursday's Child to adopt our son Joshua, and we can personally attest to the caring and dedication that small agencies bring to their clients.

Although the Hague Convention admirably seeks to ameliorate many of the abuses and uncertainties inherent in international adoptions, it does so at too high a cost for America's small adoption agencies. Three points, in particular, are especially damaging.

First, under the current provisions, only a few private organizations would be appointed for accrediting international adoption agencies. These organizations, such as the Council on Accreditation, charge outrageously exorbitant fees ranging up to \$50,000. No small agency currently in operation can afford this. Thursday's Child would simply have to shut down. Thirty years of providing caring, personal service to clients would be lost.

Second, in a related vein, the Hague regulations would require large amounts of insurance coverage that small to medium size adoption agencies cannot hope to pay for. Even large agencies would be hard pressed to carry the new premiums, and all agencies would be forced to pass this cost on to clients. Exceptionally wealthy clients might be able to handle the higher costs. However, tens of thousands of middle-income people who want to adopt would be forced to abandon their dream of children. At a time when HIV/AIDS is creating tens of millions of new orphans and the overall demand for placements is rising internationally, why would the United States support an agreement that will significantly shrink the prospective pool of adoptive parents?

Third, the new licensing regulations in the Hague agreement are not only too expensive they are also unnecessarily stringent. The standards would require that all agency workers have a Master's degree in social work. This would force many dedicated professionals with degrees in other related fields such as counseling and education to leave the adoption field. Iris Arrington-Fuller, the Director of Thursday's Child, is perhaps more knowledgeable about international

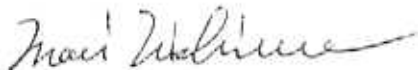
adoption and working with adoptive families than nearly any individual in the United States. Yet under the current Hague provisions, she would have to stop running her agency unless she could find the time to get an M.A. in social work.

Adoption is a long, difficult and often heart-wrenching process, but the rewards are immeasurable. Small agencies like Thursday's Child provide clients with caring, individual service that is simply not available anywhere else. The honesty, integrity and effectiveness of such small agencies are well documented. Unfortunately, The Hague agreement does nothing to help ensure that thousands of small agencies can survive. The intentions are well meaning, and, as we can personally attest, changes in international adoption procedures are needed. However, such changes must not be allowed to destroy our nation's incredible network of small adoption agencies. The Hague agreement must be changed to meet the minimum survival requirement of small adoption agencies or else millions of children will ultimately pay the price for our haste.

Very truly yours,



Russell H. Sirman, Ph.D.



Mami Nishimune